

THE SETTING OF HAITIAN LIFE

69

The hard work of cultivating the fields is abated only during the dry season—the winter months of December to February—though even during these months there is no dearth of tasks about the house which must be cared for, such as repairs of various sorts and, above all, rethatching. There is, however, also more time for recreation than at other seasons, so that throughout the countryside there are dances and cock-fights. With February, however, work in the fields must be resumed.

The Haitian farmer does not practice any formal rotation of crops, but continues to plant a given crop in the same field until the harvest becomes perceptibly smaller than in former years, when a change is made to another type of produce. Later, when the same phenomenon is again observed, a third crop may be planted, but sooner or later the land is "put to rest," in which case it either is allowed to lie fallow or is planted with cotton, which is not thought of in the same category as other crops, but is held to be a tree, and, like other trees that of themselves spring up in a fallow field, is believed to give strength to the exhausted earth. A field of this kind remains outside cultivation as a "fallen garden" for four or five years, and the animals are allowed to enter freely and graze in it until it has become a "new garden" again.

If a field is to be made out of hitherto unworked land, or ground which has lain fallow for several years is to be cultivated once again, the work is begun by cutting down the trees. The twigs are heaped preparatory to burning them, and the larger branches and the tree-trunks are used to make fences. After the dried leaves and branches have been burned, the field is cleared of small brush, and is then ready for its initial hoeing, which, according to the crops to be planted, is sometimes delayed until some months later. Usually, however, after two or three rains have cooled and softened land that has been burned over, work continues on it. The hoeing is